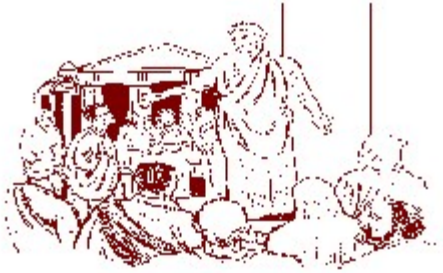


The Political Power of the Pharisees and Their Oral Traditions



Thrust statement: Jesus warns His disciples against false prophets.

Scripture Reading: Matthew 5—7; Matthew 23—25.

Orthodox Judaism is not simply “Old Testament theology without Jesus.” It is the religion of “You have heard it said.” This was Jesus’ repeated response to the erroneous oral teachings of the Pharisees. We can use the same technique today as we examine the Talmud. ^[1]

The entire gospel of Matthew is a book about conflict. This conflict centers on the religious leaders. John begins his ministry with conflict with the religious leaders; Jesus begins His ministry in Galilee with His Sermon on the Mount, which is an analysis of the religious leaders’ teachings versus God’s teachings. Jesus warns His disciples about “false prophets” in His Sermon on the Mount (**Matthew 7:15**) and in His final discourse to His disciples about the religious leaders (**Matthew 24:11, 24**). These three Scriptures are cited very loosely against believers today who do not always concur with other believers over a so-called pattern for a public worship service. Hopefully, this analysis of the Pharisees and their Oral Traditions will assist Christians in correctly handling these Scriptures about “false prophets.” The objective of this essay is to illustrate that the teachers that Jesus warned against were men who were rotten to the core.

When Jesus appeared on the scene, He confronted over one hundred and fifty years of traditions from the Pharisees. Blomberg says, “According to Josephus, the Pharisees emerged at least as early as the reign of John Hyrcanus, opposing the combination of kingly and priestly power in the Hasmonean rulers.” ^[2] Elwell and Yarbrough point out that the name “‘Pharisee’ probably derives from an Aramaic word meaning ‘separate’; hence, the Pharisees were ‘the separate ones.’” ^[3] Since the synagogues were under their control and leadership, Blair calls attention to the strong influence that the Pharisees had among the

Israelites.^[4] It is this control that John the Baptist and Jesus encountered in the beginning of their ministries. There are three basic sources that individuals rely upon for their information concerning the Pharisees: (1) Josephus, (2) the New Testament, and (3) rabbinic documents.

JOSEPHUS

The writings of Josephus help to shed light on Jesus' encounter with the religious leaders with their oral traditions. These oral traditions were later codified about 200 C.E.^[5] The Pharisees built up a body of tradition that was as binding as the written Torah. Josephus in his *Antiquities of the Jews*, written ca. 94 CE, wrote of the traditions of the Pharisees:

What I would now explain is this, that the Pharisees have delivered to the people a great many observances by succession from their fathers, which are not written in the law of Moses; and for that reason it is that the Sadducees reject them and say that we are to esteem those observances to be obligatory which are in the written word, but are not to observe what are derived from the tradition of our forefathers.^[6]

The oral law was for the Pharisee equal to the written law. As Murphy has written, "The Pharisees built up a substantial body of tradition that was as binding for them as written Torah. This tradition probably corresponds to the later rabbinic idea of oral Torah. For the rabbis oral Torah was an integral part of the Torah given to Moses on Sinai, but it was passed on orally through the generations."^[7] The stress upon the Oral Torah by the Pharisees is what caused the Pharisees to confront Jesus about His disciples breaking the "tradition of the elders." Matthew preserves this encounter:

Then some Pharisees and teachers of the law came to Jesus from Jerusalem and asked, "Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? They don't wash their hands before they eat!" Jesus replied, "And why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition? For God said, 'Honor your father and mother' and 'Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.' But you say that if a man says to his father or mother, 'Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is a gift devoted to God,' he is not to 'honor his father' with it. Thus you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition. You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you: "'These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.'" (**Matthew 15:1-9**).

In the time of Christ, the Pharisees numbered about six thousand.^[8] Josephus wrote about an incidence that occurred during the time of Herod the Great (37 BCE to 4 CE), which states the approximate number of Pharisees during this time:

(41) For there was a certain sect of men that were Jews, who valued themselves highly upon the exact skill they had in the law of their fathers,

and made men believe they were highly favored by God, by whom this set of women were inveigled. These are those that are called the sect of the Pharisees, who were in a capacity of greatly opposing kings. A cunning sect they were, and soon elevated to a pitch of open fighting and doing mischief. (42) Accordingly, when all the people of the Jews gave assurance of their good will to Caesar, and to the king's government, these very men did not swear, being above six thousand; and when the king imposed a fine upon them, Pheroras's wife paid their fine for them. ^[9]

Before approaching the second source (New Testament) of our knowledge about the Pharisees, a comment by Scheindlin graphically captures the role that the Pharisees played during the reigns of John Hyrcanus (134-104 BCE), Aristobulus I (104-103 BCE), Alexander Jannaeus (103-76 BCE), and Salome Alexandra (76-67 BCE).

Another group that was sometimes in opposition to the Hasmoneans was the Pharisees. They seem originally to have been non-priests who were eager to observe a strict rule of ritual purity and religious probity, and who therefore sometimes came into conflict with the authorities. Their leadership did not claim a cultic function, like the priests, but rather expertise in religious law and lore based on a body of religious traditions supplementary to the Torah, which they called 'the oral Torah.' They laid stress on the obligation of each individual to observe religious practices of ever-increasing complexity and detail, rather than simply relying on the priesthood to accomplish the nation's religious duties vicariously by offering sacrifices on their behalf. By the first century C.E., their number included some priests and aristocrats as well. ^[10]

NEW TESTAMENT

This background of the Pharisees from Josephus sets the stage for a proper understanding of the role that the Pharisees played in their plot to ultimately destroy Jesus who posed a threat to their authority. To grasp Pharisaic history, one must not study Phariseism in isolation from its historical roots and the strong political power this group yielded during the time of John Hyrcanus, the ministry of Jesus, and the academy established in Jamnia following the fall of Jerusalem in 70 CE. Jesus questioned their authority and this act got Him into trouble with the religious leaders.

As stated above the religion of the Pharisees is the religion of "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago" (**Matthew 5:21**). Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, dealt with the oral Torah of the Pharisees. This now-famous Sermon set the stage for the controversies that followed Jesus throughout His ministry. Davies aptly stresses the meaning of "You have heard" in his analysis of three passages in **Matthew (12:1-14; 15:1-20; 19:1-19)**. ^[11] In the first citation (**12:1-14**), Jesus discusses the Pharisees' oral traditions about the Sabbath; in the second reference (**15:1-20**), Jesus again addresses the oral Torah of the Pharisees concerning the laws of purity; and in the third quotation (**19:1-19**), He addresses their traditions concerning divorce.

Jesus, in the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount, warned His disciples about false prophets (**7:15**). Prior to this admonition, Jesus went right to the heart of oral

traditions. This analysis and condemnation of the oral Torah of the Pharisees by Jesus is conceded by many modern day scholars. Davies, one such scholar, assesses the true intent of the Sermon on the Mount when he writes, “the SM itself is not set forth as a ‘new’, revolutionary Law, in sharp antithesis to that given on Sinai.”^[12] Again, Davies points out, with justice, that the “You have heard” but “I tell you” is Jesus’ ethical demands set over against those of Judaism.^[13] North also states the matter firmly: “The approach I have chosen here is to adopt Jesus’ use of the technique, ‘You have heard it said.’ What He was attacking in each case was either a false tradition of the Pharisees or a false interpretation they imposed on an Old Testament text.”^[14]

Glasscock does not overstate the case when he says, “Jesus was about to attack the oral interpretation of the law, which most Jews of the time had been conditioned to accept as the Law itself. Six times in the next few verses he will challenge their oral traditions.”^[15] Hagner also notes that “By means of six bold antitheses representing the teaching of Jesus, Matthew now contrasts Jesus’ exposition of the true and ultimate meaning of the Torah with the more common, rabbinic understandings of the commandments.”^[16]

The oral Torah was not codified until ca. 200 CE.^[17] North illustrates through citations from the Mishnah and the Gemarah,^[18] which is the codification of the oral Torah,^[19] that there are contradictions between the written Torah and the oral Torah. Pilkington comments on the origin of the oral Torah: “The collection we now have in the Mishnah was edited by Rabbi Judah the Prince (*Ha-Nasi*), who lived from 135 to 217 CE. . . . ‘Oral’ is indeed an apt description of the Torah which followed the written Torah because it was essentially a record of oral discussion in courtrooms and academies.”^[20]

The Pharisees were in revolt against God’s written law; that is, the oral law was on par with the written law. The Jewish leaders carried out this rebellion in the name of God’s law. This melting together of the two laws caused Jesus to issue a scathing rebuke against the teachers of the law and the Pharisees. Matthew succinctly captures one such confrontation between Jesus and the Pharisees:

Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are. “Woe to you, blind guides! You say, ‘If anyone swears by the temple, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gold of the temple, he is bound by his oath.’ You blind fools! Which is greater: the gold, or the temple that makes the gold sacred? You also say, ‘If anyone swears by the altar, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gift on it, he is bound by his oath.’ You blind men! Which is greater: the gift, or the altar that makes the gift sacred? Therefore, he who swears by the altar swears by it and by everything on it. And he who

swears by the temple swears by it and by the one who dwells in it. And he who swears by heaven swears by God's throne and by the one who sits on it. "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel. "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean. "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean ([Matthew 23:15-27](#)).

Jesus not only concludes His ministry with a scathing rebuke of the religious leaders, but He also began His ministry with a brief analysis of their rejection of the written Torah for their oral Torah. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus discusses the "You have heard" (oral Torah) with "but I say unto you" (written Torah). For an extra Biblical source (oral) of this kind of unbiblical reasoning can be found among Israel's religious leaders. For instance, Rabbi Eleazar issued a statement—following the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE—upon the meaning of "bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh." His commentary is a classic example of "You have heard." The Babylonian Talmud gives the following comment about Eleazar's commentary: "R. Eleazar further stated: What is meant by the Scriptural text, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh? This teaches that Adam had intercourse with every beast and animal but found no satisfaction until he cohabited with Eve."^[21] If Matthew had recorded this saying, one could also find Jesus' "but I say unto you": "Anyone who has sexual relations with an animal must be put to death" ([Exodus 22:19](#)).

The Pharisees with their oral Torah exercised tremendous political power before, during, and after the ministry of Christ. It is in this regard to political power that Rosenberg draws attention to the domination that the Pharisees had even over the Sadducees:

Since the Sadducees were for the most part Temple priests and wealthy aristocrats, their influence over the people as a whole was rather limited, and during much of their existence they had to abide by the rulings and interpretations of the Pharisees (This extended even to the procedures of the Temple sacrifices, although the chief priests were themselves Sadducees.) With the destruction of the Temple the Sadducees ceased to exist as a sect.^[22]

Their power extended even to the control of the synagogues. This control also existed even in the time of Jesus. Even when many of the leaders of Israel believed on Jesus, still they would not confess Him for fear of being thrown out of the synagogues by the Pharisees. John, an apostle of Jesus, writes about the tremendous influence exercised by the Pharisees: "Yet at the same time many even among the leaders believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they would not confess their faith for fear they would be put out of

the synagogue; for they loved praise from men more than praise from God (**12:42-43**).^[23]

Paul, a Pharisee, sets an example of the hatred of the Pharisees against Christians. In the Philippian letter, he describes his ancestry and earlier behavior toward the church: “If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless” (**Philippians 3:4-6**).^[24] Luke calls attention, in his book to Theophilus, to the hatred exercised by some Pharisees against the followers of Jesus. One such person that Luke names is Paul; Luke lets his readers know that prior to Paul’s conversion that he gave his approval to the stoning of Stephen (**Acts 8:1**). Opposition to Stephen arose as a result of members from the “Synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called)—Jews of Cyrene and Alexandria as well as the provinces of Cilicia and Asia” (6:9).

After the conversion of Paul, he, too, had to warn against the circumcision group (**Titus 1:11**). Paul tells Titus that

They must be silenced, because they are ruining whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach—and that for the sake of dishonest gain. Even one of their own prophets has said, “Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons.” This testimony is true. Therefore, rebuke them sharply, so that they will be sound in the faith and will pay no attention to Jewish myths or to the commands of those who reject the truth. To the pure, all things are pure, but to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure. In fact, both their minds and consciences are corrupted.

They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good (**1:11-16**).

The Pharisees were a part of this circumcision group. When some men from Judea went to Antioch, they created problems by insisting that unless one was circumcised according to the Law of Moses, then one could not be saved (**Acts 15:1**). As a result of this controversy, a council met at Jerusalem (**15:4**). During the meeting of the church, which included the apostles and elders, Luke reports: “some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, ‘The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses’” (**15:5**). The influence of the Pharisees remained a viable force throughout the ministry of Paul. The Pharisees were so strong that they managed to survive the destruction of Jerusalem and establish a school in Jamnia (in Galilee).

POST-70 CE AND THE PHARISEES

Following the Jewish War, the center of Jewish life moved to Jabneh (in Greek, Jamnia) under the leadership of Johanan ben Zakkai. The priesthood, the sacrifices, and the temple worship ceased as a result of the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE.^[25] After 70 CE, the terms “Pharisee” and “scribe” drop out of common usage and is replaced with “rabbi.” The Jewish leaders who survived the fall of Jerusalem gathered at Jamnia, in western Judea,

and began studying the Torah.^[26]

Johanan ben Zakkai, who opposed the war, managed to escape the city by letting it be understood that he was dead. The Romans allowed those in the city to carry out their dead in coffins and bury them outside the city. Once he was on the outside, he went to^[27] Vespasian who granted him the right to establish a school in Jamnia. The religious leadership passed from the priesthood to the rabbis. Scheindlin calls attention to the important roll that Johanan ben Zakkai played in establishing rabbinic Judaism following the destruction of Jerusalem. He writes,

What had to be guaranteed was the religious tradition embodied in the Torah and in the ever-proliferating body of religious laws. Johanan ben Zakkai and his colleagues thus took an important step in reorganizing Judaism into rabbinic Judaism, the form of the religion most widespread until the present. Rabbinic Judaism centers on the constant study of the torah and the oral traditions associated with it and involves the meticulous observance of religious regulations, which are understood as constituting a legal system. By placing the study of the Torah at the center of Jewish religious life, the rabbis incidentally laid the foundation for the preoccupation of later Jewish^[28] culture with intellectual activities of all kinds.

Thus concludes Lavinia and Cohn-Sherbok that “It was the pharisaic interpretation of the law that survived and was continued in the work of the rabbis.”^[29] The destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE did not destroy the political clout of the Pharisees. Even before the destruction of the temple, the interpretive tradition was well developed. Rabbi Rosenberg says,

Because this interpretive tradition was well developed by the time of the Temple’s destruction in the great revolt, Judaism was able to survive. Since the largest portion of the people looked to the Pharisaic sages for guidance, the end of the sacrificial system in the Jerusalem temple could be accepted, for the Pharisees mandated other forms of religious expression that could^[30] take its place.

Sanders’ writings also collaborate the findings of Rosenberg: “The Hasidim (at the time of the Hasmonean revolt) were Pharisees, and the post-70 rabbis were Pharisees; throughout the whole period 175 BCE to 135 CE the populace basically followed the Pharisees.”^[31] This history of the Pharisees before and after the destruction of Jerusalem helps one to understand more clearly the ones to whom the term “false prophets” refer in Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5—7) in His castigation of the religious leaders in Israel (**Matthew 23**) and in His Eschatological Discourse (**Matthew 24**).

JAMNIA

Some scholars espouse a date of 85—100 CE for the writing of the Gospel of

Matthew.^[32] This date is given in conjunction with the events that transpired in Jamnia ca. 90 CE. This notion of a late date is advanced in order to maintain that Matthew's purpose in writing was to combat rabbinic Judaism in Jamnia. But Carson approaches the purpose and early date with caution: "It is unwise to specify too precise an occasion and purpose, because the possibility of error and distortion increases as one leaves hard evidence behind for supposition."^[33] It appears, so it seems to me, that Matthew's Gospel is dealing with the establishment of the identity of Jesus. But in this identity, Matthew records many of the encounters between Jesus and the religious leaders. Matthew's Gospel sets forth the uneasy feelings between Jesus and the religious leaders. The Gospel is not so much anti-Jewish as it is anti-Jewish leaders in their conflict with Jesus the Messiah.^[34]

Murphy asserts that Matthew rewrote the traditions to make the Pharisees look worse.^[35] One cannot but be respectful to the suggestion, but difficulties remain with his presuppositions. He correctly assesses the events that surrounded Jamnia when he writes about the Pharisees and Jamnia, but when he asserts that this Gospel was written to combat rabbinic Judaism in Jamnia, he cites no concrete evidence to substantiate his allegations:

After the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 CE, a group of Pharisees, scribes, and others gathered at Jamnia to restructure Jewish society in the absence of the Temple and its establishment. They confirmed the Torah as the center of the life of the Jewish people, and made Pharisaic interpretation normative for all. Torah teachers were now called rabbis. The budding Christian movement now faced not a multiplicity of groups, but a rabbinic Judaism that claimed that it alone was normative. This caused the Christians to define themselves over against rabbinic Judaism. Many have seen the activity at Jamnia as the background against which to read the Gospel of Matthew.^[36]

As noted above from the writings of Josephus and the New Testament, it goes almost without saying that Phariseism dominated pre-70 Judaism as well as post-70 rabbinic Judaism. There are substantial continuities between them concerning an emphasis on non-biblical or oral traditions.^[37] The Gospel of Matthew is a book of conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders during His ministry. Jamnia does confirm the entrenchment that the Pharisees had during Jesus' ministry; they never lost their zeal for the traditions of the elders—before and after the destruction of Jerusalem. Sanders also calls attention to the name change of the Pharisees following the destruction of the Jerusalem: "After the destruction of Jerusalem, they led the reconstruction of Judaism, giving up their party name, becoming more catholic, and taking the title 'rabbis', 'teachers'."^[38]

CONCLUSION

This essay has only skimmed the surface in the area for a proper identification of the false prophets in **Matthew 7:15; 24:11, 24**. As stated earlier, the objective of this essay is to help Christians to continue to correctly handle the Word of truth (**2. Timothy 2:15**). The

religious leaders in Jesus' day, especially the Pharisees, were so politically strong that even with the destruction of Jerusalem, they were able to regroup in Jamnia and solidify their oral traditions in written form—the Babylonian Talmud. These were the traditions that Jesus addressed in His Sermon on the Mount. These were the traditions that Jesus had to confront over and over in His ministry to the nation of Israel. Is it any wonder that He cautioned His disciples about the “leaven of the Pharisees”?

[1] Gary North, *The Judeo-Christian Tradition: A Guide for the Perplexed* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990), 73.

[2] Craig L. Blomberg, *Jesus and the Gospels: An Introduction and Survey* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1997), 47. For an excellent overview of this time period, see Raymond P. Scheindlin, *A Short History of the Jewish People: From Legendary Times to Modern Statehood* (New York: Simon & Schuster Macmillan, 1998), 25-49.

[3] Walter A. Elwell and Robert W. Yarbrough, *Encountering the New Testament: A Historical and Theological Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 56. Elwell and Yarbrough add some additional information to the history of the Pharisees: “They came into being sometime before the New Testament era. According to Josephus they gained prominence during the reigns of John Hyrcanus I (135/4—104 B.C.) and Alexandra (76-67 B.C.), Ibid. The date of the Pharisees predates even the reign of Hyrcanus. Josephus mentions the Pharisees’ activities during the time of Jonathan (B. C. 161-143; *Antiquities of the Jews*, Bk. 13, Ch. 5, Sect. 7, Par. 161 and Sect. 9, Par. 171, in Whiston, 345, 346. For an excellent history of the Pharisees, see E. P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice & Belief, 66 BCE—66 CE* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1992), 380-451.

[4] Joe Blair, *Introducing the New Testament* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 42.

[5] See Rabbi Roy A. Rosenberg, *The Concise Guide to Judaism: History, Practice, Faith* (New York: Penguin Books, 1990), 67, where he says,

The early tradition of the Pharisees had held that, while the written Torah was meant to be transmitted in written form, the oral Torah was not to be put in writing. The teachings of the sages were to be memorized, rather, and transmitted by word of mouth from scholar to scholar. It did not take long, of course, for the number of interpretations and decisions that constituted the oral Torah to become so vast that even the most brilliant scholars would have trouble recalling all of them (they also had to remember the names of the various sages who had originated or transmitted a decision). For this reason the head of the academy in the early years of the third century, Rabbi Judah the Nasi (“prince,” or “patriarch”), resolved to reduce the oral Torah to writing. . . . Then in about 220 A. D., he introduced the first authoritative summary of the rabbinic tradition to that date. This was the *Mishna* (“repetition”). The *Mishna*, based upon the laws of the Hebrew Bible, is the source of all subsequent Jewish law to the present day and is an object of study in the academies of all the forms of Judaism.

[6] See William Whiston, *The Antiquities of the Jews*, Bk. XIII, Ch. X, Sect. 6, Par. 297, in *The Works of Josephus*, New Updated Edition (Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1987), 355.

[7] Frederick J. Murphy, *The Religious World of Jesus: An Introduction to Second Temple Palestinian Judaism* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1991), 223.

[8] See N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 377, where he has an interesting comment about the six thousand Pharisees:

We do not know for sure how many Pharisees there were in the time of Jesus. The figure of six thousand, often quoted in this context from Josephus *Antiquities* 17.42, refers specifically to the Pharisees who refused to take the oath of allegiance to Caesar, some time in the reign of Herod the Great. In the forty years or so between that incident and the time of Jesus several important political events had taken place, which might well

have induced many more to join the movement. We may assume that there were in any case plenty of Pharisees who were not involved with the particular incident in question, and more again who were generally sympathetic to the movement.

^[9] Josephus, *Antiquity of the Jews*, Bk. 17, Ch. 2, Sect. 4, Par. 41-42, in *Josephus*, 453. I am indebted to Frederick J. Murphy for this citation.

^[10] Scheindlin, *Jewish People*, 40. His statement about “ever-increasing complexity” reminds one of Jesus’ criticism of the Pharisees: They tie up heavy loads and put them on men’s shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them (Matthew 23:4).

^[11] W. D. Davies, *The Sermon on the Mount* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 30.

^[12] Ibid., 31.

^[13] Ibid., 87.

^[14] North, *Tradition*, 86. See also Greg L. Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, expanded edition with replies to critics (New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co, 1984), where he says, “These radical commands (vv. 21-48) do not supercede the Older Testamental law; they illustrate and explain it. . . . The law demanded inner sanctification and its outward expression; the scribes and Pharisees disregarded the former and perverted the latter.”

^[15] Ed Glasscock, *Moody Gospel Matthew Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1997), 116.

^[16] Donald A. Hagner, Word Biblical Commentary, vol., 33a, *Matthew 1—13* (Dallas, Texas: Word Books Publisher, 1993), 111.

^[17] See Rosenberg, *Judaism*, 67; Murphy, *Jesus*, 235.

^[18] This combination is called the Babylonian Talmud.

^[19] North, *Tradition*, 84-105. See also Adin Steinsaltz, *The Essential Talmud*, translated from the Hebrew by Chaya Galai (USA: Basic Books, 1976), where he explains the Talmud:

The formal definition of the Talmud is the summary of oral law that evolved after centuries of scholarly effort by sages who lived in Palestine and Babylonia until the beginning of the Middle Ages. It has two main components: the Mishnah, a book of *halakhah* (law) written in Hebrew; and the commentary on the Mishnah, known as the Talmud (or Gemarah), in the limited sense of the word, a summary of discussion and elucidation of the Mishnah written in Aramaic-Hebrew jargon.

This explanation, however, though formally correct, is misleading and imprecise. The Talmud is the repository of thousands of years of Jewish wisdom, and the oral law, which is as ancient and significant as the written law (the Torah), finds expression therein.

^[20] C. M. Pilkington, *Judaism* (US: NTC Publishing Group, 1995), 37. For a copy of the Mishnah, see Jacob Neusner, *The Mishnah: A New Translation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988).

^[21] See Babylonian Talmud, *Yebamoth 63a*, in *The Soncino Talmud* [CD-ROM]. Available from Davaka’s Judaic Software, item no., Win CD #1W691B, call 1-800-621-8227 for this CD, cost \$299.00, [accessed 3 March 1999]. I am indebted to North for this citation; see North, *Tradition*, 86-87. Also see North for many examples as illustrated above in his

book, *Ibid.*, 84-105.

[22] Rosenberg, *Judaism*, 61.

[23] See E. P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice & Belief 63 BCE—66 CE*, (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1992), 388-412, for a detailed study of the influence and control the Pharisees had in the first century.

[24] See also Galatians 1:13f.; 1 Corinthians 15:9; Acts 8:3; 9:1, 21; 22:4, 19; 26:10f.; 1 Thessalonians 2:14f.; Galatians 4:29; 6:12.

[25] Lavinia and Dan Cohn-Sherbok, *A Popular Dictionary of Judaism* (Illinois: NTC Publishing Group, 1997), 87.

[26] Albert A. Bell, *Exploring the New Testament World: An Illustrated Guide to the World of Jesus and the First Christians*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 37.

[27] Scheindlin, *Jewish People*, 52. See also Lavinia, “Johanan ben Zakkai,” in *Judaism*, 88.

[28] Scheindlin, *Jewish People*, 53.

[29] Lavinia, “Pharisee,” in *Judaism*, 134.

[30] Rosenberg, *Judaism*, 66.

[31] Sanders, *Judaism*, 400.

[32] See David Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New Century Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 48-55. See also Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1—13*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol., 33a (Texas: Word Book, 1993), lxxiii—lxxv, for caution on both sides of the issue of dating. See also D. A. Carson, Douglas J. Moo, and Leon Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 75-81, for a conservative view on the provenance, date, and destination of the Gospel of Matthew.

[33] D. A. Carson, *Matthew*, in Frank E. Gaebelein, vol., 8, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 22.

[34] Carson, “Matthew,” in *Bible Commentary*, 20.

[35] Murphy, *Jesus*, 232.

[36] *Ibid.*, 234.

[37] Sanders, *Judaism*, 413.

[38] *Ibid.*, 412.